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C.H.H.Parry

Probably a comparative early series

Before the volume in xxx

Church Music 1300-1600

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that I came to the conclusion that it was out of the question to consider them this term; but I hope to give them plenty of consideration next term. The Spaniards also cultivated the form with success.

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I believe some people consider that the idea of inducing people to take an interest in any branch of art by appealing to their intelligence is quixotic – so I may as well observe that my object is to help you, if I may, to a more vivid interest in a very beautiful branch of art with which we may have more or less lost touch, by tracing its ~~history~~ antecedents and development, and pointing out to you what the artistic aims and the conditions of effort of the composers were in and the artistic surroundings in which it flourished. The Madrigal appears to me to be one of the most refined and delicately contrived forms of art that has ever existed – certainly one of the purest and least tainted with the alloys of vanity, show and claptrap. I don't mean to imply that you are not capable of taking pleasure in hearing works of such a pure and refined order but only that in the hearing you miss so much because the conditions of art have changed and the training we undergo to appreciate first rate kinds of music of modern Musical Art helps us but little to the appreciation of the older kinds that our conception of the purpose becomes vague.

The composers contrive new artistic effects and take
the public with them.

Take for instance modulation. A hundred and fifty
years ago people could only understand the
transition from one key to another if it was conducted
by means of definite and familiar chords, in their best
known positions. By degrees they learnt to follow
from one key to another by less familiar chords in
less obvious positions; nowadays we all feel relations
of key so greatly that a bridge from one to another is
of very little use to us. The mere sounding of a couple
of chords belonging to a new key tells its story and
enables us to find our whereabouts.

Conditions of the art of Palestrina, Wilbye, Marenzio
~~to be grasped~~ with study even to ~~rest~~ non-Musical
people.

All music appreciation of music of a high order is got at by the cultivation of some sort of intelligence. In most cases this is done unconsciously. The hearing of one standard of modern music lending us a condition of musical perception fit to feel the beauties of a standard in which the artistic conditions are more complicated. When we hear Mozart and Haydn and early Beethoven we are unconsciously cultivated up to the point of feeling the musical purpose of the more complicated conditions of the later Beethoven and Brahms's extremely intellectual devices. But the condition of the art of Palestrina and Marenzio and Wilbye are of a totally different order and we have not the chance to go through the preliminary stages which led to them – and for many people I am afraid they are only to be appreciated intellectually. But to people of intellectual tastes it seems to me the very condition of the development which led up to these achievements ought to be an interesting study. For through it all we can read the familiar

Human nature is effort.

We feel in sympathy with these delvers in new lands
just as we do in other branches of history. Or
Romance. The fact that their words command the
inner and not the outer man makes little difference.

(the) peculiarities of the early Church Music and of Madrigals. For scales can be devised for different purposes. And the scales which are devised for melody alone are necessarily very different from those devised for harmony. We are content with two principal scales or modes – subject to chromatic variation-

But in melodic musical systems our scales are too tame, and those with much more striking and characteristic intervals are chosen. Our familiar major mode or scale was known to the melodic school but was quite out of favour – and scales which form our habits of associating harmony with melody seem strange, even preferred. Now the scales which were traditional and in a sense sacred to musicians of any standing or sense of artistic responsibility at the time when people began to try and deal

Character of modes.

Unconscious readaptation of their means

with harmony were devised for melody only. But of course the composer did not know it; and it took them a century or so to tinker and share these scales till they got them into a shape which admitted to them moving freely with them. They had a great number of scales which were held to have different characters. Favourite modes had no leading note and an ugly interval of (a) tritone.

Prevented from realising the most essential relationships of modern harmonic form thereby.

When men began to attempt harmony they were therefore employing materials which were not immediately fit for their purposes – and the means had to be readapted to new ends; and it took them as long a time as that which now separates us from Purcell to realise and recast the scheme so as to make it fit for their uses.

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It is their unconsciousness of the unfitness of these scales for their purposes – and the process of instinctively readapting the scales, which forms one of the interesting features of the development. Because it was their instinctive and blind groping after beauties of expression and forms which led them from step to step to change the familiar scales – and the strange phrases of beauty we get in the transition from stage to stage are enhanced by the human nature there is in the efforts. It is much as we watch the developing faculties of a child – and that too of a child of peculiarly beautiful and attractive temperament – we see it developing its grasp of intellectual things in its attempts at learning in its ardour of imagination and growth of emotional qualities – and so we do in these early musicians. Their lovely innocence is the same. Their unsuspiciousness, and the delicious optimism in believing that the world can enjoy beautiful art without barbarism(?), and claptrap and noise and glitter and the jingle and the frivolity and the million and a half dodges and tricks which seems

Development of time prior to the Choral movement.

to the modern onlooker the only sure road to success.

The reason why they devoted such attention to Church Music. Absence of instruments. Plenty to do. New country to open up. (p.2 & 3)

Then look back at the immediate antecedents of the contrapuntal movement. P4.

Troubadours; and Trouvères developing time of a simpler kind. Robin et Marion. Sumer is icumen in. To which the early contrapuntists added their extra parts and so obtained harmonic effects. The parts sometimes added in 5 and 3 and so on, sometimes in more artistic ways. Describe drones – ways of imitating tunes in fragments. Canons.

England at the outset pp. 6.10.11.12.13

Dunstable

traits of human nature. Just as in reading the Russian literature or the Icelandic literature which in these late days has become dear to so many of us, we see ourselves as our very selves and almost more than ourselves under such strangely different conditions. The same habits of mind the same oddnesses and same inimitable(?) laws of mind and passion comprising our worth (?), so in the making of these old world idylls do we see the same men as ourselves writing just as we should though with different difficulties. We can see and sympathise with them to the full in the way in which they tripped over stumbling blocks just in the same way and for the same reasons that we still stumble over our own – we see complete parallels of our own obstinate prejudices, and our own pride(?) in the very things which prevent our own progress ~~and the same effects~~ precisely the same ~~relation between~~ use of instinct and the same building of step on step that we try to achieve now in an effort to pass from the

These limitations made them write more delicate.
(sic)

Scales.

familiar standpoints, into the new heights which we try to make our own.

The limitations by which they were hemmed in make it easier for us to see both their purposes and their difficulties; and it is also owing to their limitations that their art was so delicately and subtly beautiful. It was owing to the fact that all the best Musical Art lay solely in the province of Church Music and that all the energies of the best musical intelligences were devoted to that branch of Art that the result was so unique.

But before considering the reason for the high development of Church Art, I must of necessity say something about the state of things before the development began. The first essential step in the development of any kind of Musical Art is the formulation of scales. It is an ugly and unfriendly word but unfortunately inevitable. For Music cannot get on without the establishment of certain relations between recognised points of pitch – that is certain arrangements of tones and semitones – and the fact that scales, when as it were, still in the making had a great deal to do with.

Different scales for different purposes.

Our familiar major scale too tame and characterless
for a pure melodic system.

As I have yet to take one important representation of the Chansons Mondaines, or secular choral songs which were written in the days before Madrigals came into vogue. I hope I may be allowed to make a short summary of the aims and methods of composers and of their progress up to the beginning of the 16th century. When they began to develop the new kind of Music this notion was not to put harmony as the accompaniment to a tune, but on the contrary to just (sic) something on the top. The exact reverse of our familiar modern procedure – in fact the last thing a composer who respected his Art would have done would have been to put the tune where he could most completely hear it. That concession to human weakness was not admitted to the domain of serious art without centuries of struggles. They put their tune in the tenor or bass or alto perhaps and then added notes for the other parts which would make the simplest kinds of chords. At first they adapted rows of fifths or even more horrible fourths. Then they interspersed sixths and thirds. Then by dint of much struggle and effort they arrived at the point of giving some independent

Trying to give the new parts added some relevance to the principal tune. Consequent rise of imitation and Canon and Fugue.

Canon appealed to the theoretic mind.

Dunstable before 1440. Died 1458. Ockeghem born early in the 15th century. In the service of Charles vii. Died 1513. Josquin born about 1450. Was in the Papal Choir 1471-1484. Then in the service of Louis XII. Died 1521. Obrecht about 1440.

Better constituted artistic minds tried to vary the imitation. Josquin.

character to the parts or voices added – and at the same time varied the grouping of the chords. When the skill had advanced a little they began to think how to make the new parts added some sort of relevance to the principal tune which formed the spinal column of the organism, and in doing so they hit upon the device of giving the new voices portions of the principal tune. They applied this system wholesale in Canons, which are clear and complete simultaneous repetitions of a melody, the several voices following one another a few notes apart. This being a sort of mechanical puzzle engaged and attracted the active mind hugely; and an immense amount of mental effort was expended on almost futile ingenuity. But the most genuinely artistic men distributed their canonic imitations with more discretion; so as to give a musical completeness without mechanical precision. To this wiser(?) branch of composers Josquin Des Pres belonged – and he stands as it were the first singer of our dawn. ~~At least~~

The light is still dim with him; but he is a real singer and utters(?) things which are lovely with something of the

Obrecht was master of harmony. When he was
Capellmeister at Utrecht.

pure freshness of the earliest moments of ~~the day~~ a fine Summer morning. By his side, almost contemporary, and in musical feeling certainly not less sincere or acute(?) is Obrecht or Hobrecht – another Netherlander. The exact place and time of his birth is not known but it is supposed he was born about 1440 – and he was in Italy at the same time as Josquin, and in his company with other distinguished musicians of those picturesque days in Florence. In 1491 he was appointed Chapel Master at Antwerp which was a great musical centre. He ~~was a great worker of the contrapuntal style~~ left plenty of examples both in secular and sacred music of the device I have described to you – taking a well known tune and adding new parts to it – but I have found nothing so good of his, nor anything better by any composer of the time, thus a secular Chanson which is given by Ambros in the appendix of his important history. In this the tune, which is a very admirable one is given complete, but the ~~alternate~~ phrases are given to Tenor and Alto alternately, and the bass and Treble supply the new parts; and ~~not only~~ are contrived so as to give a definite form to the whole quite independent and extra to the tune.

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Unrhythmic nature of these old Chansons Mondaines.

Smooth flow of beautiful ~~chords~~ sound, obtained by stringing together simpler chords.

General progress of music spread to lighter forms. The general progress was of course facilitated by the invention of printing which came about ~~in the~~ during the lives of Josquin and Obrecht. P.18

Early in the 16th century a change comes over the ~~spirit of the~~ scene. I am inclined to think it came partly from the Choral dance tunes, which were of course not contrapuntal ~~by~~ but strictly rhythmic. That is instead of the voices moving about independently they moved in chords together. Under the old system it was quite a special object to distribute evenly the motion of the parts. Where people wrote dance tunes they were obliged to give that up

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and deliberately harmonise. I am not prepared to say that the dance tunes influenced the serious composer. But I think it very likely that the effects they heard in them - in the shape of ~~smooth~~ equally moving chords – gave them an idea of a new means of effect which they began to avail themselves of very soon. Even Josquin himself left at least one specimen of a lively rhythmic kind of Chanson, and as ~~the~~ time went on composers serious and light alike fell under the influence of that kind of chordal movement which is akin to dance rhythm. In the lower branches of Art composers of course devoted themselves deliberately to rhythmic choral effects; and as long as they were held in restraint by the tradition of the old modes, and of the pure school of old Choral art they wrote most charming things. But even in ~~that~~ the light branch of art which henceforward is represented by the Madrigal the influence is at once apparent and it must be confessed that

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the Madrigals in the first stages in which we know them are distinguished from most of the Chansons Mondaines ~~as that~~ more by the new element of rhythmic simultaneous choral motion ~~as by~~ than any other feature.

The Madrigal p.20

Arcadelt p.21

Scales and traditional melodies. From 800 to 1100 development of notation and the beginning of the system of putting things definitely on record. Vague neumes pairing with definite notes which established both definite relation of pitch and duration. 900 melody pairing with Diaphony/Duophony(?) - 1100.

Duophony(?) into descant. The system of the fifths still making frequent appearances 1100 – 1300. Struggle with the earlier difficulties of harmony. Establishment of certain principles of action in Descant art. 1300 – 1380 age of the theorist(?).

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Scales.

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